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&
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An Interview with David Lodge

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David Lodge ile Röportaj

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David Lodge, who was born in South London on 28 January 1935, is Emeritus Professor of English Literature of Birmingham, where he taught from 1960 until 1987, when he retired to write full time. He is a very distinguished contemporary British novelist as well as a critic. He is known for novels satirizing academic life, particularly “The Campus Trilogy”- *Changing Places*, *Small World* and *Nice Work*. He has also written on literary criticism such as *The Language of Fiction*, *Working with Structuralism* and *After Bakhtin*. His style shows the literary tendency of the post-war British neo-realism and has a deep impact on the English literature. His thoughts on New Criticism, Structuralism and Bakhtin’s theory of fiction open a new door to the British critical circle. Some of his books have been already translated into Turkish. Though 83 years old, Lodge is still active in the English literary arena and has written two brilliant memoir books in the last few years: *Quite A Good Time to be Born: A Memoir: 1935-1975* and *Writer’s Luck: A Memoir 1976-1991*.

Aytaç Ören (AO): Firstly, I must state that interviewing you is a great honor for me. Thank you very much for giving me this chance. I have some questions whose possible answers I have been pondering as one of your readers for a long time. Your place in English literature is both interesting and important as you were born in 1935, which we consider is one of the most critical dates in the 20th century, just before the Second World War, because you saw and experienced both the war years and the post-war years. You witnessed the changes of style and attitude in literature, especially the novel, after the war. And then you experienced the post-modern experiments in literature. I am trying to say that you are a traditional, modern and post-modern writer. You have been successful in combining these identities in yourself. You have a holistic view on literature. And so, as I understand from your books, you do not divide literature or novel as a traditional, or modern, or post-modern one. You believe that the modern novel is a continuation of the traditional novel and the post-modern novel is a continuation of the modern one. Is that right? Or do you have different thoughts about it?

David Lodge (DL): I agree with your description of my view of the evolution of the novel. Because I was for many years an academic critic I am very conscious of the history of the novel as a narrative form and I do not privilege one kind of fiction over another. The novel is an elastic form, constantly developing new techniques and effects – which sometimes revive features of earlier fiction with new applications.

AO: In these years, you were surrounded by many great writers. I do not know how many of them you have met so far, but T.S. Eliot was alive when you started your university education and during your working years at university. Bernard Shaw and James Joyce both died when you were younger. Maybe you were a friend of Beckett’s or E.M. Forster’s or Harold Pinter’s. We know that you knew

Graham Greene very well. You worked with Malcolm Bradbury together and he was a family friend, too. Kingsley Amis and Muriel Spark were nearly your contemporaries; and Evelyn Waugh... I really have difficulty in imagining this period you have been living in. You say in *the Quite a Good Time to Be Born, A Memoir 1935 - 1975*: "I drew my first breath on the 28th of January 1935, which was quite a good time for a future writer to be born in England..." Please tell me what breathing this atmosphere is like!

DL: Some of the writers you mention, like Shaw and Forster, were born long before I was, and so there was little chance that I would know them personally, as I did for instance in the case of Malcolm Bradbury and in a more limited way with Graham Greene. The British literary world is a small one, but very crowded, and it is normal for writers to meet each other and sometimes form friendships that are more than merely social. In my second memoir, I give a detailed account of what it was like to be a professional novelist in Britain at a particularly interesting and fertile period.

AO: In the first one of your memoirs, we see a photo of you as a child. And in the second one; *Writer's Luck, A Memoir: 1976 - 1991*, there is another photo of you as an adult. You believe the time when you were born is an example of your luck. What were your greatest chances? What were their positive effects?

DL: I was lucky to have lived through the Second World War when I was just old enough (5-10 years old) to have some memories of that epic event, and I lived through a fascinating period of social and cultural changes in post-war British society which gave me plenty to think about and write about. I was also lucky, like many writers, to have an English teacher at school who encouraged me to read serious modern literature and fortunate to belong to the first generation of British children to enjoy free secondary education and (until recently) free university education.

AO: We can understand from your two latest books that you are planning to write a memoir about your maturity, from 1992 to now. If this is true, I am very curious about the next one. Is there a book like that? You were an academician in the English Literature Department, at the University of Birmingham, where you taught from 1960 until 1987 and then retired. It seems that you retired so that you could write full time, as authorship is your priority. The first is about "before and during university and your first years at work", but the second is about "your mature years", mostly at university as a professor. The next one will be about the remainder of your experience as a writer, about what makes you what you are, a summary of David Lodge. What's your plan for that?

DL: It is of course impossible to get the details of a whole life into a book, even one that has three volumes. The author must select. The second memoir, *Writer's Luck*, is more detailed than the first. It deals with a much shorter period than the first volume, but is about the same length. Those were the years in which I established my reputation as a novelist and also diversified into new forms of

writing, drama and film, and I wanted to describe how this happened in some detail.

AO: And we know you have written many books since you retired. You have nearly 15 books, which were written before your retirement, but nearly 20 books after it. Your decision about the retirement looks to be a wise one. Now, do you regret getting retired early? And I am sure you had many plans for future before your retirement. Have you realized most of the plans you made for your retired self? From what perspective is this period different? I mean the period after 1987?

DL: I was very fortunate to be able to take early retirement from my university post, with a modest pension which gave me a certain amount of financial security as I started to earn my living as a freelance writer. Happily, it was not long before I was earning much more money from my books than I ever did as a professor. I never regretted the decision. But now I am an old man – 83 this year – and I feel I may be approaching the end of my creative career. But I have had “a good innings” as English cricketers say when they achieve a high score.

AO: In the preface of *Lives in Writing*, you say, “I have combined creative writing with the practice of literary criticism for more than fifty years, and I think of myself as primarily a novelist in the former capacity, and a critic and theorist of the novel in the latter. But as I get older I find myself becoming more and more interested in, and attracted to, fact-based writing...” The number of your works on literary theory has decreased in the last decades when compared with before. You are hosting many identities together, but being a novelist seems to outweigh the others. You wrote *A Man of Parts* (H.G. Wells) and *The Year of Henry James*, two facts-based novels. What made you think of doing that? Could you open the topic a little more?

DL: I think there are several reasons why I have been attracted to fact-based narrative rather than the purely fictional kind [in my later years]. Most novelists draw on their own experience in creating their fictions, but as they get older they find they have used up that source of inspiration and have to do research in new territory to create a plausible fictional world; or they take real historical persons and events and treat them with the psychological inwardness that is characteristic of the novel as a form. That is what I did in *Author, Author* and *A Man of Parts*.

AO: The subject will change a bit, but there seems to be uncertainty about your approach to or interest in poetry. You have written fictions (novels), non-fictions (theory books), some plays and some adaptations for television, but no poems. Is there a special reason for that? Does poetry have a different place in your life?

DL: I did write a few poems in the first half of my life. One of them, inspired by the death of Marilyn Monroe, was published in the *Spectator* and is included in *QAGTTBB*. Of course I read a great deal of poetry as a teacher, and for my own pleasure, and I published essays on Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes, but as a creative writer poetry was not my métier. I am basically interested in narrative,

and most modern poetry is lyrical. I can enjoy it and learn from it, but prose is my medium of choice. In the 19th & 20th centuries prose developed a wonderful capacity to represent human experience both objectively and subjectively in the novel.

AO: Let's switch again to another matter. You have written important theory books like *Language of Fiction*, *After Bakhtin*, *The Art of Fiction*, *Consciousness and Novel* and so on. They were written especially during your active work at university. Are your thoughts on fiction and non-fiction similar to before? Or can we say that your interest in theory books on literature has lost its importance over the years?

DL: Up to 1987, when I took early retirement from my professorial position at Birmingham, I pursued what I call in the memoirs "a twin-track career" as both scholar-teacher and creative writer. These two professions are often seen as incompatible, but from the age of 15 or 16 when I first became attracted to reading literature I was interested in understanding how those books worked on me as a reader, and put as much effort into writing the essays for my English teacher as I did with my early attempts at short stories. The same dual engagement continued when I was a student at University College London -- I wrote a short novel (unpublished) in my first long summer vacation and stories in a student magazine -- and later when I became a university teacher. While I was at Birmingham, I published a new novel and a new book of criticism alternately over some 25 years.

This was a period when academic literary criticism as practiced in the English speaking world was challenged and partly transformed by an intellectual movement emanating from Continental Europe, variously named at different stages of its development as Structuralism, Post-structuralism, and Deconstruction, eventually bundled together with several other new approaches with the label "Theory". I found some of these methodologies stimulating and useful in teaching and analyzing literature, and set myself to make them more accessible to British students and teachers in several critical books of my own and in two bulky Readers, which are still in circulation, containing selections of key texts.

I never saw these two activities, literary criticism and literary creation, as incompatible, but rather as symbiotic, "a close association of two organisms of different species that live together often to their mutual benefit," to quote a dictionary definition of symbiosis. Over time however the new theory-driven criticism seemed to me (and many others who were once stimulated by it) to become a stifling orthodoxy which was killing the pleasure principle in the experience of literature because of the esoteric jargon in which it was written; and one of the blessings of early retirement for me was that I no longer had a duty to read any of it. I still went on writing and publishing criticism, but for a general audience, not an exclusively academic one.

AO: We know your story of how you decided to write *The Art of Fiction* from the preface. It is really a literary hand-book. There are a lot of topics describing this art by giving well-chosen quotations from so valuable novels. The interesting thing about it is that you have been able to open specific literary topics to general readers. Your novels like *Nice Work*, *Small World*, *Thinks...*, *Author Author* involve many literary subjects, but at the same time the ordinary reader can read and enjoy them. How did you do that? Literature is material for your fiction, a subject in which you are a specialist, but your audience is both massive and general. How can that happen?

DL: I like to think that is because I regard all writing as essentially communication between writer and reader. I believe that the secret of good writing is to read and re-read your own work in progress as if you hadn't written it, and then revise it. This should be a continuous process but it can be assisted by reading the text aloud, and by putting it aside for a time so that it is not totally familiar when you return to it. Then you see how to improve it, and discover new possibilities in your own material in the process. Your readers may not grasp every nuance in your book, but they will enjoy it more in consequence. And I try to build into a novel the information a reader needs to understand and appreciate it. *Nice Work* for instance has an intertextual dimension: its plot has much in common with Victorian novels about conflicts in society caused by the Industrial Revolution. I couldn't assume that all my readers would be familiar with all or indeed any of these novels so I made my academic heroine give a lecture on them which tells readers what they need to know.

AO: And Birmingham. You weren't born there, but it seems to be your hometown. Perhaps it can be said that Birmingham, Rummidge in your novels, is a background of some of your fictions. What are your thoughts about the real Birmingham and its fictional reflections? In one of your works, *Changing Places*, when one of your fictional characters, Mary Makepeace says while looking down from the plane, "There's a great dark smudge over there. That must be a big city." Your American professor, Morris Zapp, tells her, "It's probably Rummidge. A great dark smudge sounds like Rummidge." We can find enough information about this great dark smudge in *Nice Work*. Rummidge was a big industrial city in the Victorian period. You give Birmingham with its historical identity to your audience. We can also read its historical background. This point is very important for you, right? And you think the Victorian period has left indelible marks on England and English literature, right?

DL: Yes, certainly. As regards my relation to London and Birmingham: they are my two home towns but I think you always feel you belong to the place you were brought up in. Though I have lived in Birmingham much longer than anywhere else, I still identify as a Londoner. I have no desire to move back to London, though I am glad it is only 90 minutes away by train, and go there frequently. Birmingham, under the fictional name of Rummidge, is the setting of several of

my novels. At first, as in *Changing Places* and *Small World*, I exploited the negative opinion British people in general have about Birmingham for purposes of comedy, but got to know the city and its inhabitants better I gave a more realistic and sympathetic account of it – in for instance *Nice Work*. But I will never feel as if I am a native of the place – more like an adopted son. There are hundreds of novels set in London, but not many set in Birmingham and I think it was an advantage to me as a young novelist to have this largely unexplored territory almost to myself. Its character was certainly formed in the nineteenth century, but it has been modernized in various ways, though not always elegantly, and is now a vibrant multicultural city almost unrecognizable as the one I first came to in the 1960s, and there are a number of new young writers who live here and describe it.

AO: You could have derived Rummidge from “rummage”, I think. It means “to search for something by moving things around carelessly and looking into, under, and behind them.” Is that right?

DL: The fictional name of Rummidge is derived from “Brummagem”, the dialect word historically used to refer to the city. But the word “rummage” has appropriate associations too, of untidiness.

AO: And how do you choose the fictional names?

DL: As regards the names of fictional characters, you will find an answer in the chapter on “Names” in *The Art of Fiction*. They have to seem appropriate but not too obviously symbolic. Place names are invented in the same way.

AO: The Academy is very ironically portrayed in your novels. There are some academicians who try to work at their desks for hours, but cannot write anything, others who try to speak to a computer program called ELIZA about personal problems, who steal their students’ academic work, who see the academic conference as a touristic opportunity, and soon. You send very strong messages to us by using the academy in this way, don’t you? Is the academy in your fictions different from the real one?

DL: The sub-genre of the campus or academic novel always tends towards comedy, satire and irony, for the simple reason that the institution is dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom and truth, but the people who inhabit it have usual human failings such as greed, jealousy, lust, deceitfulness etc., so there is always an ironic contrast between the ideal and the reality. However, my rendering of the academic world is not wholly negative. The heroine of *Nice Work* for instance is a conscientious and caring teacher.

AO: Many people including me think that you are an important figure in developing campus novels. After *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis, you have great contributions to this type. What is your thought about the campus novel? What do you think about your role in it?

DL: I think that Malcolm Bradbury and I extended the form of classic campus novel, which is typically set in a single location, for example Mary McCarthy’s

The Groves of Academe and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, into the global campus novel, exemplified by my *Small World* and Malcolm's *Rates of Exchange*. Such novels involve travel to different countries and the clash of different cultures.

AO: There are many different academic characters in your novels. But one must be you. Which character do you think is closer to you? Which one symbolizes you in your novels? Professor Philip Swallow?

DL: I think I have a few traits that belong to each of these characters, but I'm not going to tell you what they are.

AO: Your characters are really different from each other. You are very successful in drawing them. But I can't help putting this question to you. "Swallow" is a bird name. In "Siegfried Von Turpitz," "turbit", without "z", reminds us of a bird name, too. Robyn is pronounced similar to "robin", a bird name too. Desiree calls Philip's surname "Sparrow" several times by mistake. I want to know whether you have used these bird names on purpose. I think birds symbolize "freedom" and "strength" in mythology and is there a relationship with that here?

DL: I wasn't conscious of the bird theme. "Turpitz" is meant to evoke the word "Tirpitz", the name of a famous German battleship in the Second World War, which inflicted much damage on British ships until it was eventually destroyed by bombing, or more likely scuttled by its commander. The fictional character of Turpitz in the novel was a German tank commander in the war. In the plot he is the chief opponent of the young hero Persse McGarrigle.

AO: I want to ask some questions about the same topic. You seem to be a master in finding very original and ironic character names. For example, Felix Skinner (a publisher), Cheryl Summerbee (a booking clerk at the Heathrow Airport), Miss Sybil Maiden (it reminds us Disraeli's *Sybil or Two Nations*), Arthur Kingfisher and so on. Perhaps Wilcox is taken from *Howards End* by E.M. Forster. The meanings of these names are very suitable to the stories in your novels. The names of your fictional characters are a puzzle, right? They have some extra and secret meanings, don't they? How do you choose them? What affects or inspires you while making up them?

DL: I would refer you again to the chapter on "Names" in *The Art of Fiction* which, among other things, explains the links between my Wilcox and Forster's. The name contains the words "will" and "cock". These businessmen have strong wills, and are, at the beginning of their stories, male chauvinists. The elderly female don called Miss "Sybil" is an allusion to the prophetess of Delphi in classical mythology, where Philip actually meets Miss Sybil Maiden, the retired Cambridge don. As you know, *Small World* is full of intertextual references to folk tales, classical mythology and medieval and Renaissance chivalric romances.

AO: Your novels are generally structured with two main stories. Two different cities, two different people, two different worlds are generally brought together.

Is this a strategy which you follow in writing a novel? What's your aim in that? Do you think comparison will open your readers' horizon?

DL: Yes, I am attracted to binary structures in my fiction, plots which unexpectedly bring together two different and contrasting professions, or cultures, or value systems, which creates conflict and generates narrative. It may also derive from my temperamental dislike of extreme dogmatic opinions. I can usually see two sides to every argument.

AO: This question is about me as a translator of some of your works. What do you think about translators? In *Small World*, there is a translator who sends letters to the writer of the book he is translating. He asks many questions about possible translation problems. The hero Persse meets him and other translators in a pub in Tokyo. We see that they can translate some English words into Japanese with a little difference. At the end of the book, for example, one of them says "narrow world" which implies *Small World*. What is your thought about translation and translators? Are they the second writer of a work?

DL: My books are published in more than thirty countries, so I am very indebted to translators, and have established friendships with several of them, particularly in France where my books are very popular. The character of the Japanese translator in *Small World* was inspired by Susumu Takagi who has translated most of my books, and is currently working on my memoir, *Writer's Luck*. He is devoted to my work and is the best proof reader I have ever known, finding errors that all the English editors missed. I paid tribute to all my translators in the dedication to *Deaf Sentence* which was a particularly hard challenge to their skills because of the comical verbal confusion caused by the hero's deafness.

AO: As far as I remember, you believe translation of a novel is more difficult than a non-fiction book. For example, when I wanted to translate one of your books, you said it would be more difficult than non-fiction translation, as far as I remember. Is it really hard? Why do you think so?

DL: I don't remember saying that, but I was probably thinking that dialogue is more prominent in fiction than in non-fiction, and it is often difficult to find equivalents for idioms, slang words, puns, regional varieties of English etc. in another language.

AO: And I am sorry again. There are too many questions to ask you, and I know asking all of them is not possible. I see the topics are constantly keeping changing. Patricia Waugh was one of your students. You understood how important the term, metafiction, was and you directed Waugh to study this term and its function in novels. In her book, she thanks you for that. So I can understand you pay attention to educating students during and after university, and even your readers with your books. And you have a great social responsibility. Do you think most academicians are like you? Writers and their social responsibility are another matter, but what's your thought about that?

DL: Not many academicians write novels, so in that respect I was not a typical academic. For 27 years I led a double life as both novelist and academic. I tried to keep them separate, and to do my best in each capacity, but it became increasingly difficult as I became more senior in the academic profession, with more serious responsibilities to the University as an institution, to students and colleagues. A novelist is responsible only to his own idea of artistic integrity, which may have effects that upset some readers.

AO: And my country. You have been to Turkey only once? Your impressions about Turkey? Is there anything to say about our literature or novel, the Turkish one?

DL: Yes, I have been to Turkey only on one occasion, early in the 1980s, to attend a conference of Turkish university teachers of English and English Literature in Ankara with some other British scholars, after which we transferred to Istanbul for a few days. It was a fascinating experience for me. Some traces of the impressions it made on me it can be glimpsed in the fictional Turkish episode in *Small World*. I have to confess that I know nothing about Turkish literature, past or present. There are so many books written in English-speaking countries or in translation from the major European languages, that I never find enough time to investigate the literature of other countries.

AO: Like your readers, I wonder what kind of person is behind these works and also I know this interview will seem to be incomplete and left half finished. Maybe I will have a chance like that in future once again. What do you want to say as last words?

DL: I would like to thank you, Aytac, for your interest in my work and in the great effort you have made to translate my books and make them accessible to Turkish readers.

AO: Thank you very much for this precious interview. It was a great pleasure for me to talk to you about these matters. Thanks again.

August, 2018

Authors' Biographies

Emine Fişek is Assistant Professor in the Department of Western Languages and Literatures at Boğaziçi University in İstanbul. She is the author of *Aesthetic Citizenship: Immigration and Theater in Twenty-First-Century Paris* (Northwestern University Press, 2017), which explores the relationship between immigration, citizenship and national identity as they have played out in French theatre. She is currently developing a research project on the impact that cultural memory, urban transformation and international migration have had on Turkish theatre in the twenty-first century.

Burcu Karadağ Can graduated from Fatih University with a B.A. in English Language and Literature in 2013. She also did a double major on Political Science and Public Administration. She spent one semester at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia as an Erasmus student. She completed her M.A. at Ege University in 2017. Her M.A. thesis is titled as Representations of Men and Masculinities in British World War I Poetry. She is currently an English Language and Literature PhD student and works as a research assistant at the same university.

Merve Atasoy received her M.A degree in English Literature from Boğaziçi University in İstanbul in 2015. Currently, she is a PhD candidate and a research assistant in the same department. Her interests are contemporary British and American drama, documentary theater, media, and human rights.

Aytaç Ören born in Ankara in 1972, graduated from Ataturk University and recieved his master's and doctorate degrees there. He is interested in novel, especially postmodern novel and campus novel, metafiction and David Lodge. He is at University of Health Sciences now.

M. Tarık Ablak İstanbul'da dünyaya geldi. 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi'nin İslam ve Din Bilimleri Bölümü'nde lisans ve Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü'nde yan dal eğitimini tamamladı. İngilizce ve bilimsel hazırlık döneminin ardından şu anda Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Eski Türk Edebiyatı Bölümü'nde yüksek lisans ders dönemine devam etmektedir. İngilizce, Arapça ve Farsça bilmektedir. Evli ve bir çocuk babasıdır.